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A new spy order at the CIA

Webster began major changes. The next boss must see them through

Just up the Potomac from the Pentagon, on the other side of the river from Washington, they're redecorating at the Central Intelligence Agency. To some of the denizens of the high-security buildings scattered across the agency's 258-acre campus, it seems as if they're always redecorating. But at the top of the agency's headquarters, in a big suite on the seventh floor, the decorating is already done. Robert Gates is described as the leading White House candidate to replace William Webster and become the nation's 15th director of central intelligence, and several other figures with ties to George Bush have also been mentioned. Whoever moves into the seventh-floor suite will find little to quibble with in his surroundings. In fact, he should feel right at home.

Senior officials knowledgeable about Webster's tenure at the CIA—including many early skeptics and some longtime critics of the agency—say the next CIA chief will inherit an intelligence bureaucracy that is vastly improved from the one left by the late Director William Casey four years ago. The architect of the conspiracy that blossomed into the Iran-Contra scandal, Casey had dragged the agency right to the cusp of the bad old days, when congressional investigators pried into the most sensitive areas of the espionage business. Webster restored the image and the integrity of the CIA, just as he had done for the Federal Bureau of Investigation when he took command in 1978 and it was still reeling from its Watergate-era abuses. Everyone gives the former judge and federal prosecutor credit for that.

But he did more. Surprised as everyone else was by the riptide of revolution that swept away the communist regimes in Eastern Europe in 1989, Webster refocused the CIA's vast analytical capabilities to address the shape of the post-cold-war world. Continuing a trend begun back in 1981,

when the agency moved away from a system of analyzing events separately in terms of their economic, military and political dimensions, Webster abolished the CIA's office of global issues, which many had criticized as delivering fuzzy analyses of things like world oil reserves, market trends and terrorism. He replaced it with the new office of resources, trade and technology, which focuses more closely on regional developments. New multi-agency centers on counterterrorism, counternarcotics and counterintelligence have assumed many of the OGI's old responsibilities. The counternarcotics center gets especially high marks from other intelligence agencies. For long-range planning, Webster created a new position, deputy director for planning and coordination, and promoted CIA veteran Gary Foster to the job. Foster can deal with all four of the agency's other directorates: intelligence, operations, administration and science and technology. "It just shows," says a senior official, "that we can change as change is required."

The next CIA boss will also inherit a CIA with more spies than several years ago.

In the argot of espionage, this is known as HUMINT, or human intelligence. Since the Carter administration purges in the agency's directorate of operations, the criticism had been that the CIA was relying more and more on RUMINT, rumor intelligence. With the blessings of President Bush, who served for a year as CIA director in the Ford administration, Webster pushed hard to get more spies on the ground. And he has also continued a trend begun under Casey, to recruit more broadly among minorities and foreign nationals. It was not easy. "Since JFK," says a senior Pentagon official with more than two decades in the intelligence business, "the CIA has been subjected to what in the Soviet Union would be called pogroms, which we call investigations. That makes the agency real gunshy." There has been some progress, according to several knowledgeable people, though more needs to be done. "HUMINT is right at the top of the agenda," says a senior official. "It's a big job, but we've made a good start on it."

Contra connection. There has been speculation that Gates would encounter problems during confirmation hearings. After Casey was incapacitated with a brain tumor, Gates was named to replace him. He withdrew amid suspicions that he had helped Casey mislead the congressional committees investigating the Iran-Contra scandal. But people familiar with Casey's hip-pocket management style at the CIA believe he never told Gates about his bizarre scheme to swap missiles for hostages and divert the proceeds to the Contras in Nicaragua. Gates says David Boren, the Oklahoma Democrat who chairs the Senate Intelligence Committee, "was cleared" by the Iran-Contra inquiry.

The next nominee will be grilled about a different matter. David McCurdy, another Oklahoma Democrat, who is the new chairman of the House intelligence committee, has been pushing to revamp completely the sprawling, anarchic intelligence bureaucracy that extends from the CIA to the Pentagon to more than two dozen alphabet-soup agencies in and around Washington. People familiar with some of the half-dozen secret studies now underway indicate that the proposals, if ap-

proved, would result in the most sweeping changes in American intelligence since the CIA was created in 1947. Webster was criticized for having no vision for the new role of the intelligence community in the post-cold-war world. Gates may not have the Iran-Contra albatross around his neck anymore. But if nominated, he would have to show he's up to one of the most demanding jobs anywhere in government. ■

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Outgoing. *President Bush thanks CIA Director William Webster for his work.*

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